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CONFIDENTIAL

July 31, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Marshall Wright

SUBJECT: The Midnight Sun

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TO)   PAF
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The Evans Novak column in the Washington Post this morning has full
details on this matter. The period of no publicity is therefore over and,
given the nature of the case, we can expect considerable press interest.

The Evans Novak column attributes the seizure of the Midnight Sun and
keys the whole story to "steadily rising Russian influence" in Somalia and
East Africa.

Except for the fact that life is unfair, we would have won the race to get
the vessel released before its seizure became a matter of public knowledge.
The Somali Ambassador in Washington has been under instructions for 5
days to deliver a note from General Siad to President Nixon informing us
that the vessel and crew will be released. The note still cannot be delivered
however, because the Somalis cannot decode the message, even after several
retransmissions. (They have new coding machines -- doubtless provided by
the Russians -- and just cannot make them work properly.)

I am sorely tempted to nip this story in the bud announcing what we know of
the Somali decision. However, on balance, I do not think that prudent because
we have indications, both from the Somali Embassy and from Italian sources,
that the garbled part of the message may, repeat may, involve some kind of
condition which we might find troublesome.

We cannot, therefore, announce at this point that the matter has been
resolved. Hopefully, we will be able to do so quite soon.

In the meantime, I think the White House Press Office should leave this one
strictly alone and simply refer all questions to the State Department. We
will get our innings when we are able to announce the letter to President
Nixon and the decision to release the vessel and crew.